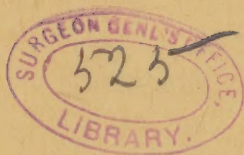


MONTGOMERY (D.W.)

Diarrhea from
potassium iodid.



Compliments of the writer.
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DIARRHEA FROM POTASSIUM IODID.

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IF a drug is given in order to compass some distinct purpose, and succeeds, we call its action a direct effect, and retire, like King Malcolm, in measureless content, as nothing is quite so satisfactory as the successful administration of a remedy. But, if, in addition to or instead of the action desired, some unexpected or disagreeable result follows, we are correspondingly chagrined, and we call this an oblique action of the drug. When potassium iodid is prescribed it is not intended as a purgative; nevertheless, in rare instances, it causes, as an oblique action, a severe diarrhea.

An accountant, aged twenty-five, came to me March 6, 1892. He had been exposed to venereal infection five months previously, and shortly afterward had noticed a stickiness of the meatus and an indolent swelling in the right groin, which did not break down. He had also remarked some pain and induration along the urethra, near the meatus. When he first came to me the right lip of the meatus was slightly enlarged and bluish in color. There were a roseola on the trunk, especially on the abdomen, without subjective symptoms; patchy thinning of the hair of the head and a papular rash on the scalp. He had also enlargement of the posterior cervical glands, and of those in the right groin, but no



enlargement of the epitrochlear lymphatic glands. There was one flat condyloma on the left natis, and two smaller ones on the right. He suffered from habitual, though slight constipation, which was easily corrected by eating brown bread and molasses for breakfast. He afterward had a papular rash on the head of the penis, and from time to time suffered from mucous patches in the mouth.

Toward the end of August, 1892, that is, about six months after first coming to me, and in the eleventh month of his disease, his hair began to fall out again, and a red, ill-circumscribed, slightly raised roseola appeared, principally on the back and belly, and distinguishable from urticaria by the absence of itching. This was an instance of the rarely observed late roseola of syphilis, which often assumes the form of rings over the trunk and limbs, and is likely to be mistaken for erythema multiforme.

The man afterward suffered from an excoriation or ulcer on the outer wall of the right nostril, which healed in a reasonable time under black wash locally and mercuric iodid internally.

On May 15, 1893, in the twentieth month of his disease, potassium iodid was prescribed for the first time, and in moderate doses—sixteen grains a day for sixteen days. As soon as he commenced taking the drug, copious watery diarrhea set in, and persisted during the whole time of its administration. The patient, thinking the diarrhea part of the effect desired, continued the remedy until the bottle was finished, without returning to consult me. When I saw him shortly afterward he was reduced from a robust, fine-looking fellow to a pale, wan shadow, with the appearance of being in the last stages of pulmonary tuberculosis. He quickly regained his lost flesh and ordinary health.

There can hardly be any doubt that the diarrhea was caused by the iodid, as it commenced on taking the drug, continued during its administration, and ceased

when the medicine was discontinued. Moreover, the man remembered having had a similar diarrhea on taking a "blood-purifier," and patent medicines of this class almost always contain potassium iodid.¹

This man was getting one of the best brands of the drug, so it is not likely that the diarrhea was caused by the presence of free iodine or iodates, frequent impurities in the cheaper grades. It seems to be very difficult for manufacturers to make pure potassium iodid, and for this reason the good brands are dear, but in no case does their price preclude their being dispensed at the usual rates, leaving a fair margin of profit.²

Both Fournier³ and L. Lewin say that although sometimes the inconveniences complained of in taking potassium iodid may be due to impurities in the drug, yet such impurities are not always the cause of the accidents, as they may happen in the course of the use of an absolutely faultless salt.

¹ Diarrhea, either with or without vomiting, has been observed even after small doses of potassium iodid. Sometimes the dejections contain blood. (Nebenwirkungen der Arzneimittel. L. Lewin. Zweite Auflage, S. 407.)

² In Henry Koplik's case of iodism in a nursing infant (The Medical Record, September 24, 1887), the drug seems to have given rise to irritation all along the alimentary canal, for there were dyspeptic symptoms, some looseness of the bowels, and a little increased secretion in the nose, in addition to the skin-eruption.

³ Fournier (Traitement de la Syphilis, p. 418) tells of an eminent chemist who himself used to purify the potassium iodid prescribed for him.

